

# WHEN A MAN MARRIES

The Novel from Which the Play "Seven Days" Was Made.

By MARY ROBERTS RINEHART,

Author of "The Circular Staircase" and "The Man in Lower Ten."

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## CHAPTER XV.

### Suspicion and Discard.

Every one was nasty the next morning. Aunt Selma declared that her feet were frostbitten and kept Belle rubbing them with ice water all morning. And Jim was impossible. He refused to speak to any of us and he watched Belle furtively, as if he suspected her of trying to get him out of the house.

When luncheon time came around and he had shown no indication of going to the telephone, an order to get up, and a conclave, and Max was chosen to remind him of the hour. Jim was shut in the studio, and we waited together in the hall while Max went up. When he came down he was somewhat ruffled.

"He wouldn't open the door," he reported, "and when I told him it was noon time, he said he wasn't hungry and he didn't give a whoop about the rest of us. He had asked us here to dinner; he hadn't proposed to adopt us."

So we finally ordered luncheon ourselves, and about 2 o'clock Jim came downstairs, sheepishly, and ate what was left. Anne declared that Bella had been scolding him in the upper hall. I doubted it, she was never seen to speak to him unnecessarily.

The excitement of the escape over, Mr. Harbison and I remained on terms of armed neutrality. And Max still hunted for Anne's pearls, using them, the men declared, as a good excuse to avoid tinkering with the furnace or repairing the dumbwaiter, which took the queerest notions and stopped once, half-way from the kitchen, for an hour with the dinner on it. Anyhow, Max was searching the system of a "Purloined Letter" and Gaboriau's "Monsieur Le Coq."

He went through the seats of the chairs with hampers, tore the beds, and lifted rings, until the house was in a state of confusion. And the next day, the fourth, he found something—not much, but it was curious. He had been in the studio, looking behind the dusty pictures, with Jimmy expostulating every time he moved anything, and the rest standing around watching them.

Max was strutting. "We get it by elimination," he said importantly. "The pearls being nowhere else in the house, they must be here in the studio. Three parts of the code having yielded nothing, while the fourth, Ladies and gentlemen, let me have your attention for one moment. I tap this canvas with my finger. I prepare to move the canvas—so. And I put my hand in the pocket of this disreputable coat—oh, behold!"

Then he gave a low exclamation and looked at something he held in his hand. Every one stepped forward, and on his palm was the small diamond clasp from Anne's collar!

Jimmy was appalled. He tried to smile, but no one else did.

"Well, I'll be flabbergasted!" he said. "You say, people, don't think for a minute I put that thing there? Why, I haven't worn that coat for a month. It's—it's a trick of yours, Max."

But Max shook his head. He looked stupefied, and stood gazing from the clasp to the pocket of the old painting-coat. Betty dropped on a folding stool, that promptly collapsed with her, and created a welter of feet running rapidly around the room and an occasional soft thud.

Each thud was accompanied by a grunt or two from Jim. Flannigan was grinning silently. Once there was a smart rap, an oath from the policeman, and a mirthless chuckle from Jim. The chuckle ended in a crash, however, and I turned. Jim was lying on his back on the roof and Flannigan was wiping his ear with a towel. Jim sat up and ran his hand down his ribs.

"I didn't mean to offend you," he said sulkily. "Only I'm tired of having you choked down my throat every time I open my mouth. And don't go just yet. Flannigan is going for my clothes as soon as he lights the lamp, and somebody ought to watch the stairs."

That was all there was to it. I said I would guard the steps, and Flannigan, having ignited the combination, whatever it was, went downstairs. How was I to know that Belle would come up when she did? Was it my fault that the lamp got too high and that Flannigan couldn't hear Jim calling? Or that just as Bella reached the top of the steps Jim should come to the door of the tent wearing the barrel part of his hot-air cabinet and yelling for a doctor?

Bella came to the door on the upper step, with her mouth open. She looked at Jim, at the inadequate barrel, and from them she looked at me. Then she began to laugh, one of her hysterical giggles, and she turned and went downstairs again. As Jim and I stared at each other we could hear her gurgling down the hall below.

She had violent hysterics for an hour, with Anne rubbing her forehead and Aunt Selma burning a feather out of the feather duster under her nose. Only Jim and I understood, and we did not tell. Luckily the next thing that occurred drove Bella and her nerves from everybody's mind.

At 7 o'clock, when Bella had dropped asleep, and everybody was dressed for dinner, Aunt Selma discovered that the house was cold and ordered Dal to the furnace.

It was Dal's day at the furnace. Flannigan had been relieved of that part of the work after twice setting fire to a chimney.

In a few minutes Dal came back and spoke a few words to Max, who followed him to the basement, and in ten minutes more Flannigan puffed up the steps and called Mr. Harbison.

I am not curious, but I knew that something had happened. While Aunt Selma was talking to Anne, who said she had always been tremendously interested in the subject, and if women got the suffrage would they be allowed to vote?—I slipped back to the dining-room.

The table was laid for dinner, but Flannigan was not in sight. I could hear voices from somewhere, faint voices that talked rapidly, and after a while I located the sounds under my feet. The

men were all in the basement, and something must have happened. I flew back to the basement stairs, to meet Mr. Harbison at the foot. He was grimy and dusty, with streaks of coal dust over his face, and he had been examining his revolver. I was just in time to see him slip it into his pocket.

"What is the matter?" I demanded. "Is any one hurt?"

"No one," he said coolly. "We've been cleaning out the furnace. How interesting—'With a revolver.' How interesting and unusual!" I said dryly, and slipped past him as he barred the way. He was not pleased. I heard him mutter something and came rapidly after me, but I had the voices as a guide, and I was not going to be turned back like a child. The men had gathered around a low stone arch in the furnace-room and were looking down a short flight of steps into a sort of vault, evidently under the pavement. A faint light came from a small grating above, and there was a close, musty smell in the air.

"I tell you it must have been last night," Dallas was saying. "Wilson and I were here before we went to bed, and I'll swear that hole was not there then. It was not there this morning, sir," Flannigan insisted. "It has been made during the day."

"And it could not have been done this afternoon," Mr. Harbison said quietly. "I was fussing with the telephone wire down here. I would have heard the noise."

Something in his voice made me look at him, and certainly his expression was unusual. He was watching us all intently, while Dallas finally who took Jim, because of the excitement. From the main floor of the furnace-room a flight of stone steps surmounted by an arch led into the coal cellar, beneath the street. The coal cellar was of brick, with a cement floor, and in the left wall there was a small opening about three feet by three feet leading into a cavernous void, perfectly black—evidently a similar vault belonging to the next house.

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those infernal reporters to do something useful for once," Max suggested. But he was indignantly brushed. We would have starved first, Jim was peering into the transmitter and knocking the receiver against his hand, like a watch that had stopped. But nothing happened. Flannigan reported a box of breakfast food, two lemons, and a pineapple cheese, a combination that didn't seem to lend itself to anything.

We went back to the dining-room from sheer force of habit and sat around the table and looked at the lemonade. Flannigan had made. Anne would talk about the salad her last cook had concocted, and Max told about a little town in Connecticut where the restaurant keeper smokes a corn-cob pipe while he cooks the most luscious fried clams in America.

And Aunt Selma related that in her family there had been a chicken smothered in cream. And then we stirred the weak lemonade and nibbled at the cheese. "To change this griddled martyrdom," Dallas said finally, "where's Harbison?" Still looking for his watch?

"Watch!" Everybody said it in a different tone.

"Sure," he responded. "Says his watch was taken last night from the studio. Better get that movement like a hawk at the telephone. Likely he can fix it."

Flannigan was beside me with the cheese. And at that moment I felt Mr. Harbison's stolen watch slip out of my hand, slide gleefully across my lap, and clatter to the floor. Flannigan stooped, but luckily it had gone under the table. He had had it picked up, to have had to explain how I got it, to see them try to ignore my picture pasted in it—oh, it was impossible! I put my foot over it.

"Drop something!" Dallas asked perfunctorily, rising. Flannigan was still half kneeling.

"A fork," I said, as easily as I could, and the conversation went on. But Flannigan's eyes were on me. He knew he was watching my every movement like a hawk after that, standing just behind my chair. I dropped my useless napkin, to have it whirled up before it reached the floor. I sick to Betty that my shoe buckle was loose, and actually got the watch in my hand, only to let it slip at the critical moment. Then they all got up and went: willy nilly to the library, and Flannigan and I faced each other.

Flannigan was not a handsome man at any time, though up to then he had at least looked like one. But now as I stood with my hand on the back of my chair his face grew suddenly menacing. The silence was absolute. I was the pallid wretch alive, and opposite me the black towered and glowered, and held the yellow remnant of a pineapple cheese! And in the silence that wretched watch lay and ticked and ticked and ticked. Then Flannigan creaked over and closed the door into the hall, came back, picked up the watch, and looked at it.

"You're unlucky, I'm thinking," he said finally. "You've got the nerve all right, but you ain't cute enough."

"I don't know what you mean," I quavered. "Give me that watch to return to Mr. Harbison!"

"Not on your life," he retorted eagerly. "I give it back myself, like I did the bracelet, and—like I'm going to give back the necklace, if you'll act like a sensible little girl."

I could only choke.

"It's foolish, any way you look at it," he persisted. "You are, let's say, a lot of friends, folks that think you're all right. Why? I reckon there isn't one of them that wouldn't lend you money if you needed to had it."

"Will you be still?" I said furiously. "Mr. Harbison left that watch—with me—an hour ago. Get him and he will tell you himself."

"Of course he would," Flannigan conceded, looking at me with grudging approval. "He wouldn't be what I think he is if he didn't lie up and down for you."

There were wags in the hall. Flannigan came down. "An hour ago, you say. And he told me it was gone this morning! It's a losing game, miss. I'll give you twenty-four hours, then—then the necklace, if you please, miss."

Pardon me for disturbing you," Bella said in her best dear-me-I'm-glad-I-knewed manner. "But—Flannigan says the dinner has not come."

"Good Lord," Jim exclaimed. "I forgot to order the confounded dinner!"

It was 8 o'clock by that time, and as it took an hour at least after telephoning the order, everybody looked blank when they heard. The entire family, except Mr. Harbison, who had not appeared again, escorted Jim to the telephone and sung around hungrily, suggesting new dishes every minute. And then—the couldn't raise Central. It was fifteen minutes before we gave up, and stood staring at one another despairingly.

"Call out of a window and get one of those infernal reporters to do something useful for once," Max suggested. But he was indignantly brushed. We would have starved first, Jim was peering into the transmitter and knocking the receiver against his hand, like a watch that had stopped. But nothing happened. Flannigan reported a box of breakfast food, two lemons, and a pineapple cheese, a combination that didn't seem to lend itself to anything.

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There were wags in the hall. Flannigan came down. "An hour ago, you say. And he told me it was gone this morning! It's a losing game, miss. I'll give you twenty-four hours, then—then the necklace, if you please, miss."

Pardon me for disturbing you," Bella said in her best dear-me-I'm-glad-I-knewed manner. "But—Flannigan says the dinner has not come."

"Good Lord," Jim exclaimed. "I forgot to order the confounded dinner!"

It was 8 o'clock by that time, and as it took an hour at least after telephoning the order, everybody looked blank when they heard. The entire family, except Mr. Harbison, who had not appeared again, escorted Jim to the telephone and sung around hungrily, suggesting new dishes every minute. And then—the couldn't raise Central. It was fifteen minutes before we gave up, and stood staring at one another despairingly.

"Call out of a window and get one of those infernal reporters to do something useful for once," Max suggested. But he was indignantly brushed. We would have starved first, Jim was peering into the transmitter and knocking the receiver against his hand, like a watch that had stopped. But nothing happened. Flannigan reported a box of breakfast food, two lemons, and a pineapple cheese, a combination that didn't seem to lend itself to anything.

We went back to the dining-room from sheer force of habit and sat around the table and looked at the lemonade. Flannigan had made. Anne would talk about the salad her last cook had concocted, and Max told about a little town in Connecticut where the restaurant keeper smokes a corn-cob pipe while he cooks the most luscious fried clams in America.

And Aunt Selma related that in her family there had been a chicken smothered in cream. And then we stirred the weak lemonade and nibbled at the cheese. "To change this griddled martyrdom," Dallas said finally, "where's Harbison?" Still looking for his watch?

"Watch!" Everybody said it in a different tone.